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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [SCUL](#) [KMPI](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: JORDANIAN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: WOMEN MAKE GAINS

REF: A. AMMAN 3284
[B](#). AMMAN 3241
[C](#). AMMAN 3207
[D](#). AMMAN 2985

Summary

[1](#). (SBU) Women made considerable gains in the July 31 municipal elections as compared with 2003. Almost eight times more women ran as candidates in 2007 than in 2003 (355 versus 46), and women will hold at least 241 seats in municipal councils (as opposed to 97 in 2003). The election also resulted in one Jordanian woman winning election for mayor. Women activists noted advances in women's participation as candidates and as voters, but had hoped for more directly-elected council members. That said, women activists described the quota for women's seats in municipal councils as necessary and described it as part of a transitional phase in a conservative society. End Summary.

Rise in Women's Participation and Success

[2](#). (SBU) The 2007 Municipalities Law mandated that 20 percent of municipal council seats (211 in total) be filled by women. These seats would be in addition to any seats won competitively by a woman (refs C and D). Of the 355 women candidates that ran on July 31, 23 won seats outright. This, plus the 195 women who earned quota seats throughout the country on election-day, 16 quota seats to be filled, and seven additional women who earned quota seats in Amman, means that a total of at least 241 women will sit on municipal councils. The 16 quota seats that were not contested by women candidates will be filled by government appointment of local women leaders. It is also possible that additional women will be appointed to serve as members in the Amman municipal council.

[3](#). (SBU) A comparison of the 2007 and 2003 elections shows that women's political participation rose sharply. In 2007, 355 women ran for municipal council seats, almost eight times more than in 2003, when just 46 women ran for council seats, with five winning. Following the 2003 vote, 92 women were appointed as council members, bringing the total number of women council members at that time to 97. Thus the 241 women council members in 2007 will represent more women in councils than the 20 percent quota required by law and a significant increase from 2003.

Woman Wins Mayoralty

[4](#). (SBU) Of six women running for mayoralties in the country, one won. Rana Hajayeh became the only woman elected mayor, winning the contest in Al Hassa, in the Tafileh governorate.

Hajayah was cultivated by IRI's office in Amman when that program was funded by MEPI. She also took part in ECA's International Visitor Leadership Program on "State and Local Government" in 2006 as well as in USAID-funded NDI and IRI candidate and campaign training activities in Jordan over the past year.

USG Program Participants Earn Seats

¶5. Two women who gained municipal council seats have taken part in Embassy programming. Sana Bakri, who ran as an independent candidate and won a seat in the Krimeh municipal council without using the quota system, was the recipient of a MEPI small grant promoting advocacy among people with special needs. She participated in a MEPI-funded program in Alexandria, Egypt in April, 2007 on "Leadership for Civil Society Leaders." She then became a student, with USAID funding, at the Embassy Amman Public Affairs' American Language Center. Reem Al-Nasser won a municipal council seat in the district of Tareq under the quota system. She took part in the May, 2006 International Visitor Leadership Program, "Promoting Interfaith Dialogue." Al-Nasser attributed her candidacy to the eye-opening experience she had in the United States during the program.

Quota system: Depressing Women's Support for Women?

¶6. (SBU) While the quota system will produce a significant increase in female council members, as intended, there has been some post-election speculation that it reduced the incidence of women voting for women. By this reasoning, supporters for leading female candidates - confident of a

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quota seat - cast their ballots for males in a competitive race. In a possible case of such strategic voting, one which also displays the significance of tribal politics, Fardous Mohammad Al Khaldi won a (quota) council seat in the Sabha and Dafianeh municipal council near Mafraq with zero votes. Khaldi nominated herself for council member on the last day of registration, knowing that she would win by quota. She subsequently told the Petra news agency, "I did not vote for myself because of my commitment to my tribe and the residents of my town to vote for another candidate, who unfortunately did not win." She said that she did not vote for herself (nor did her husband or five children) because she would not break her commitment to the tribe and that "the priority is for electing a man." In her small town of Kom Al Raf, 95 per cent of the 351 registered voters voted, just not for Khaldi.

¶7. (SBU) Khaldi's case raised questions in the press, with some commentators questioning her legitimacy. Regardless, after the election results were announced, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs affirmed the legal basis of Khaldi's newly-won quota seat, pointing to the Municipality Law (Article 9, B) that clearly allows women "candidates" to take seats under the quota.

Reflections on the Women's Vote

¶8. (SBU) Several women activists told emboffs that they were disappointed that women did not do better in winning municipal council seats outright rather than gaining these seats from the quota, attributing the outcome to the conservatism of Jordanian society. Some also expressed disappointment over the way in which tribal and family politics trumped issue-oriented politics. Regardless, most women activists strongly defended the quota system as a "transitional phase" for women's political leadership in the country. Anas Al Sakit, head of the Jordanian Women's Association, said in an interview with the newspaper Al-Dustour that "society holds the view that women are less important than men" and that women need the quota system as a

"transitional phase" to further political empowerment. Former Minister of Culture and women's rights activist Asma Khadr described the quota as the "first phase" of giving women public leadership opportunities. Jordanian Senator Layla Sharaf said that the quota was still necessary given that, in her view, Jordanian society is still not ready to place women in decision-making positions without the quota. That said, she pointed to the extensive level of women's participation at the ballot boxes as a positive sign (57 per cent of registered women voters, or about 447,000 women, cast ballots) even though the number of women candidates was low because of apprehension among women to run.

¶9. (SBU) Rima Abu-Dalbuh, member of a legal team with the Jordanian National Commission for Women, asserted that women's organizations played an important role in mobilizing and motivating women candidates and voters. She said to Al-Dustour that this election provided women with the experience for future elections. Abu-Dalbuh also stressed that Jordanian women were now more politically aware than before and familiar with all "old and new legal texts, and of all amendments to the law that are equitable to women."

¶10. (SBU) On the question of whether women voted for women, it was clear from newspaper commentary and the feedback from contacts that women candidates did not decidedly benefit from the votes of women. Several women with whom we spoke said that they voted based on how their husbands or families asked them to vote. Other women insisted that they did not vote for women simply because they were women, but rather voted for the person they deemed to be the most competent.

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